

U.S. Naval Air Station,  
Chapel and Armory (The Octagon, Building 16)  
Central Avenue  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida

HABS No. FL-238

HABS  
FLA,  
17-PENSA,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING RECORD  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-238

U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION,  
CHAPEL AND ARMORY  
(THE OCTAGON, BUILDING 16)

Location:

Central Avenue, U.S. Naval Air Station,  
Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida.

Latitude: 30° 20' 52" Longitude: 87° 16' 05".

Present Owner:

Commanding Officer.

Present Occupant:

Navy Relief Society.

Present Use:

Thrift Shop, offices and conference center.

Significance:

The Chapel and Armory is the oldest structure on the Naval Air Station. It survived the Civil War, though the matching Commandant's Offices was destroyed.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Built before 1836.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Chapel and Armory, built on the old Pensacola Navy Yard, has been the property of the U.S. Navy during its entire history, except when the Yard was occupied by Confederate troops in 1861-62.

4. Alterations and additions: Alterations to the interior and exterior of the building have been extensive over the years. In fact, little of the original building remains, except the octagonal masonry shell has survived. The building has been substantially enlarged, although the octagonal shape has been retained. In the late 19th or early 20th century, a concrete platform about 10 feet wide and 4 feet high was built around the building. By 1918, a first floor columned porch had been constructed over the concrete platform. By 1934, the lower porch had been enclosed, and a second floor outer closed porch had been added. By 1961, a single-story office space (lean-to extension) had been constructed on the south side of the building, and a small frame storage building had been built to attach to the east side.

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Extensive interior alterations were made to the first and second floors during the 1930s. Alterations were made to the lounge walls, ballroom walls and ceilings and to the service stairs and locker room. In 1937 the kitchen was relocated and in 1938 the ballroom was redecorated. Air conditioning was added in 1939. Interior partitions have been shifted many times to provide desired space in the building. One of the last modifications came in 1950 when the lighting system was revised for the Aviation School of Medicine Psychological Research.

B. Historical Context:

Building 16, and its counterpart No. 15, also of octagonal design, appear on maps as early as 1836. Building 15, the Commandant's Offices, was destroyed during the Civil War. Perhaps as unusual as the shape of building 16 was the use of the building as an armory on the first floor and a chapel on the second floor. The building has served many other purposes including use as a dispensary and surgeon's office about the turn of the century. It continued to be used as such until the Navy Yard closed in 1911.

Following the opening of the Naval Air Station in 1914, Building 16 was used as a Commissioned Officers' Mess and Club (also known as Bachelor Officer's Mens Club). References in the Naval Air Station records to a ballroom in the building indicate the Octagon was used at least in part as a dance hall. Since 1940, Building 16 has been used as a Research Center for the Naval Aviation Medical Center and most recently as the Navy Relief Office, Thrift Shop and Conference Center. According to Miss Occie Clubb's notes in the Pensacola Historical Museum, it was also used at one time as a lyceum building, lecture hall and as an insurance and allotment office. There is a reference to the Officers Wives Club being assigned space on the first floor about 1965. Building 16 has been one of the most versatile of any building on the station in terms of its occupants.

Prepared by:

Dr. William S. Coker  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Building 16, an octagonal two-story structure, built as the Navy Yard's Armory and Chapel before 1836, survived the Civil War, though the matching octagonal Commandant's Offices flanking Central Avenue across the street was destroyed. The Octagon, extensively altered and nearly obscured behind enclosed, modern two-story porches, now contains 9,559 square feet of floor area.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The 1915 drawing on file in the Public Works Center indicate the building, octagonal in plan and two stories high, is 48'-0" across in diameter with each facade being 20' long. A first floor porch, extends 12'-0" out beyond each facade. A second floor porch built over the first floor porch has since been added.

An 8'-0" wide extension of the porch on the first floor exists on the south facade and about one-half of the southwest and southeast facade.

A single-story storage building, approximately 16'-0" x 20'-0", has been added to the northeast enclosed porch.

2. Foundations: Because of alterations and remodeling the foundations are inaccessible. A 1935 drawing in the NAS Public Works Center indicate the foundations to be brick along with those of the porch which extend 2'-2" above grade.
3. Walls: Original walls, common bond brick now painted white, were salmon in color with the header course every sixth course. First floor walls are 24" thick and narrow to 16" at the second floor to receive the floor joists.
4. Structural system, framing: First floor joists are 3" x 10", 2'-8" above grade. Second floor joists, 3" x 12" are 18" on center and carried on heavy beams which are supported on four tapered octagonal wood columns from the first floor. Roof beams and trusses are inaccessible.

5. Porches: A twelve foot wide porch at the first and second floors encircles the entire structure. Originally open on the first floor, both porches now completely enclosed, are supported on columns 12" in diameter. A 2'-9" wide flight of stairs on the northeast facade leads to a small porch 2'-9" x 7'-6" at the second floor level which provides access to the second floor enclosed porch.

A small 4'-6" x 5'-0" wooden porch with three steps up leads to an entrance door leading to an addition on the south porch.

The porch is enclosed on the west facade containing the main entrance, and the northwest, north and northeast facades on the first floor with brick. The second floor enclosure is 5" German siding. The porch on the southwest, south and southeast facades is enclosed on both the first and second floors with 9" German siding. The porch on the east facade, containing a second entrance to the first floor, is enclosed on both the first and second floor with 5" German siding.

6. Chimneys: There are no chimneys on the structure, although two chimneys originally existed on the south and north roofs.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: All of the original doors have been removed. A circa 1915 drawing in the NAS Public Works Center files indicates that the four original doors, all on the first floor facing north, east, south and west were double, five-panel solid doors; four smaller panels over one larger panel. On either side of the double doors were narrow panels with one sidelight, 10" x 4'-4", over a molded panel with the sidelight having an intricate muntin pattern. A similar ornate muntin pattern existed in the transom over the door and the side panels. A flat arch and keystone existed above the transom.

At one time there was a striped awning that covered the doorway as well as first floor windows.

The main entrance door on the west facade is a six-light over six-panel modern door. Wooden column pilasters on the side of the door support a classical Greek Revival pediment that exists over the doorway.

The two doors that open to the south porch addition are both nine-light over three panels with nine-light transoms. Entrance doors on the east facade are double swinging double doors, constructed of 6" board placed vertically and brushed with spar varnish. A circular window, 20" in diameter with a horizontal and vertical muntin pattern is set in at eye level. On the second floor entrance from the small porch on the northwest facade is a six-light over two-panel door. Beneath this opening on the first floor is a solid five-panel door that leads to a storage area on the north facade. Similar doors also exist on the single-story storage building; two on the east end and one on the north.

- b. Windows: All of the original windows have either been removed or covered over. Only the jambs remain in several places on the second floor. The original windows were wood sash, double hung, nine-over-nine light, with flat arches a stretcher and header in width. A keystone consisting of three courses of brick and covered with a sand cement, exists in the arch. The windows are 45" wide with a granite sill.

Openings on the west facade, two each flanking the doorway on either side, are six-over-six light with wood sash, double hung. On the second floor, windows are four-over-four double hung wood sash. Over the doorway on the second floor are six-over-six double-hung sash windows coupled together. Openings on the south exposed first floor facades are nine-over-nine wood sash with three-light transoms. Generally, the glass size is  $8\frac{1}{2}" \times 12"$ . Windows on the second floor porch enclosure are three-light double outswinging wood sash with glazing  $11\frac{1}{2}" \times 15\frac{1}{2}"$  and three-light transoms.

Windows on the north facade on the first floor are nine-over-nine double hung wooden sash with glass size  $11\frac{1}{2}" \times 13\frac{1}{2}"$ . Openings on the second floor are six-over-six, wood sash, double hung with glazing being  $9\frac{1}{2}" \times 15"$ .

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The octagonal pitched roof of the original structure is covered with asphalt shingles. The second story porch enclosure has a flat pitched roof covered with a composition gravel material. Half-round galvanized gutters and round galvanized downspouts carry to the base of the porch enclosures. A flat roof exists on the single-story

porch addition on the south side while the storage building on the east side has a gable roof with asphalt shingles. The apex of the octagonal roof once terminated in an ornamental bird pedestal. Only the base of the pedestal remains.

- b. Cornice, eaves: The original roof structure has boxed eaves with a cyma recta over a flat bed mold cornice supported by three pairs of wooden scroll brackets on each facade. Eaves on the second floor porch have exposed rafters that carry to the edge of the plain cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Entrance, which is accessible through the west entrance doorway, to the first floor conference room, which occupies all of the original first floor space, is through a vestibule with a stairway leading to the second floor. Off the vestibule to the north is the women's restroom and off to the east is the men's restroom. From the conference room a doorway on the south leads to a small room which has two doors that open to the south porch addition. An opening off the conference on the east opens onto a small vestibule with coat hooks and hat racks. This vestibule contains the east double entrance doors. Another door off the conference room on the northwest side leads to several rooms on the enclosed porch used for storage purposes.
  - b. Second floor: The second floor space of the original structure is entered from the landing area at the top of the stairs. The area is partitioned into a number of office spaces for use by the Navy Relief Society. Two doors off the stairs landing provide access to the porch areas which are also utilized by the Relief Society for office space and display areas.
2. Stairways: The stairway to the second floor from the entrance vestibule on the west rises four risers to a landing, then to another landing, and two more risers to the second floor. The stairway is 4'-1" wide with an 11" tread and a 7" riser. Step ends are decorated with a scroll-out motif and three turned balusters per tread that support a molded handrail 2 3/4" across.

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The handrail begins at a tapered octagonal newel post with a plain cap and turns at the landings on a 4" square post. On the second floor the railing and balusters turn again on 4" square posts and die into the west wall. Stair treads are covered in a vinyl tread covering while the landings are covered with a corrugated rubber mat material.

3. Flooring: Vestibules on the east and west are covered in 6" square ceramic tiles in alternating colors of light and dark browns. The floor space within the original structure is carpeted on the first floor, while the second floor is covered with 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " exposed board. On the first floor the south porch area is covered with vinyl tile and the north porch area is covered with 6" ceramic tile similar to that in the vestibule. Restrooms are also covered in vinyl tile. On the second floor the porch areas are all in vinyl tile with the exception of the stair landing area which is 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " board.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: The exterior walls of the original structure, now enclosed by the porches, are plastered and painted a light green on the first floor. The same finish exists on the second floor except on the south facades where the original brick is exposed and painted white. On the first floor porch ceilings are also plastered except in the rest room where box beams and narrow boards are painted white. On the second floor porch ceilings are plaster on the north side and exposed rafter and roof sheathing on the south side.

Within the original structure on the first floor, walls are covered with natural wood paneling to a height of 7'-10" where a plaster wall then carries to the ceiling covered with a fiberboard material. On the second floor walls and partitions are beaverboard with acoustical fiberboard ceilings.

5. Doorways and doors: Doorways into the conference room on the first floor are double doors with circular windows, of material identical to the wall paneling. Doors off the stair landing on the second floor are double 6-panel molded doors. Other interior doors on both floors are 5-panel doors with molded panels.
6. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Cast iron steam radiators supply heat from the central heating plant.



- b. Lighting: The lighting is modern fluorescent and incandescent.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure is oriented on an east-west axis with Building 34, the V.I.P. Guest House, with the entrance to Building 16, the Octagon on the west facade. Central Avenue, now a pedestrian tree-lined walk only, bisects the axis of these two buildings. South of the building is a parking area. At one time during the building's history when it was utilized as an officer's mess, the area was occupied by tennis courts. To the east, Rockwell Avenue runs north and south. A small parking area for the building sits west of the street. On the other side of Rockwell Avenue across from the Octagon is a pattern and tool storage building. Immediately north of the Octagon is another parking area and one tennis court, oriented north and south fenced with woven wire. A picnic table shelter with a metal corrugated roof sits west of the court.
2. Original landscape design: South of the building is a brick walk 13'-2" wide, paved in a herringbone pattern with a stretcher course of brick as a border. A concrete walk, 3'-5" in width, leads from this walk near the entrance south to the parking lot. The lawn area in the vicinity of the entrance contains live oak trees, while the entrance is framed with palms and yews.

Prepared by:

John A. Sanderson  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1972

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings and other records:

Measured drawings, floor plans and index cards indicating architectural, mechanical, electrical and general work on the Octagon in Engineering Department, Public Works Center, NAS, Pensacola, Florida. Records are basically World War I to the present.

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Measured drawings, floor plans, Navy Yard maps in Bureau of Yards and Docks Plan Files, Navy Department, on microfilm, copy in Old Military Records Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Index (16 mm.) see last part of Reel 13 and first part of Reel 14. Drawings, etc. of Pensacola Navy Yard are numbered 800-1-1 to 800-45-407, Reels 641 through 648.5 (35 mm.). Records date from about 1829 to end of, World War II.

A copy of 1969 drawing is available in HABS Field Records.

- B. Early Views: There are several early photographic views of the building, available at the two museums:

A circa turn of the 20th century photograph shows the building with its concrete apron and without the porches. It is at the Pensacola Historical Museum, Pensacola, Florida.

Four photographs of the building on file at the Naval Aviation Museum, U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida are as follows:

(1) 1916 aerial view of the Naval Air Station showing the Octagon with the lower porch added, negative #000519; (2) view dated 22 August 1918 showing the building in its World War I camouflage suit with numerous tents pitched around it, negative #010019; (3) view taken on 31 October 1919, after the tents had been removed, but with the building still camouflaged, negative #010080; and (4) 1934 aerial view of the Octagon painted white with first and second floor enclosed porches clearly visible, negative #010028.

- C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building Property Records. Plant Account Office, Public Works Center, U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Young, Lucien. United States Navy Yard and Station. Written in 1910 and published in 1964. Copy at Naval Air Station Library, Pensacola, Florida.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) under joint sponsorship of the National Park Service, The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Florida, and the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board. Measured and drawn during the summer of 1972 under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, by: Rodd L. Wheaton (Architect, HABS), June Project Supervisor; John A. Sanderson (University of Florida), July-August Project Supervisor; Dr. William S. Coker (University of West Florida), Historian; John M. Szubski (Princeton University), Architect; and by Student Assistant Architects: J. Tucker Bishop (University of Texas, Austin); John C. Hecker (University of Illinois, Urbana) and Scott A. Kinzy (University of Nebraska) at the United States Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written descriptive and architectural data in the fall of 1980. Jack Boucher, a HABS staff photographer, took the documentary photographs in March of 1974.